

Two Leaves of Sketches for Arnold Schoenberg's Concerto for String Quartet and Orchestra

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The four pages of sketch material pertaining to movements III and IV of this Concerto aptly fill in those gaps in the otherwise mostly uninterrupted sequence of sketches cited and discussed in the complete edition of Schoenberg's works.¹ Although it is to be noted that these gaps were never editorially acknowledged, their existence would have been impossible to ignore by anyone seriously studying this material, unfolding as it does in so remarkably consecutive a fashion. Their being now so neatly filled in by the contents of these four pages is at the same time a cause for celebration and dismay, for it is very difficult to understand that whatever was to be found among Alma Mahler's papers should have been left unexamined and unexplored by editors engaged in research toward the publication of Schoenberg's *Gesamtausgabe*. To put it another way, one might justly shudder at such manifest negligence, and yet take pleasure and satisfaction from these particular results of the Moldenhauers' ardent pursuit of interesting musical materials, bequeathed to, and now made generally accessible through, the Library of Congress. In due time, it may be sensible to hope that these additional sketches, as well as anything further that may turn up, will be discussed in a supplementary volume of the *Gesamtausgabe*, Series B.

For present purposes, the gaps filled in by the four pages of sketch material will be identified by the measure numbering found in Schoenberg's published Concerto,² as follows:

1. Movement III

- a. between measures 171 and 177;
- b. between measures 248 and 253: a sketch for measures 251 to 256;
- c. between measures 261 and 268: a sketch for measures 264 to 268;
- d. between measure 274 and the end of movement III at measure 291:
five sketches encompassing measures 275 to 291.

2. Movement IV

e. between measures 295 and 322: sketches for an elaborated version of measure 297, and for measure 314, besides a continuity sketch for top line melodic material in measures 292 to 327.



"Concerto for String Quartet & Orchestra Sketch" by Arnold Schoenberg

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The sketch material itself ranges from hastily written *aides-mémoire* to fully detailed, practically fair-copy passages. In very few instances is there any pronounced change between these annotations, or working drafts, and the final score. From this point of view, the sketches confirm Schoenberg's prevalently rapid working habits; segments being elaborated seldom needed the kind of painstaking, laborious process of refinement that we associate with Beethoven's sketch material, where it is sometimes difficult to believe the degree of

transformation a piece of musical material might have to undergo before reaching its final, acceptable shape. In some instances, a significant difference between a sketch and the final form goes no further than a change in transposition level: on one page, two versions of measures 170-174 and 175-176 appear at the minor seventh above--with a large cautionary *Verschiebung wie anfangs* (transposed as at the outset). Yet the change here may bespeak Schoenberg's decision--perhaps *gradually* taken--to transpose movement III from the original B-flat to D Major, in order to alleviate Handel's persistent emphasis on B-flat. (In the Largo--movement II--no such change was needed, since Handel's movement is also in G Minor.) The overall key-scheme of Schoenberg's arrangement (or rather, *recomposition*) of the Concerto is therefore: B-flat-g-D-B-flat, which could be interpreted as a symmetry of thirds surrounding the tonic B-flat, even if we allow for the tonally necessary difference between the constituent major and minor thirds. (A different version of an all-encompassing relation by thirds was suggested to me by Paul Zukofsky, who conducted a most memorable performance of this work in 1985 with the Juilliard School's Contemporary Music Ensemble and the Juilliard String Quartet. It will be discussed further on.)

A sketch for the return from the first ending in movement IV, with measures numbered as in Handel (yet "off" by one measure) reveals a very elaborate, rather overloaded version of measure 297, garlanded with imitative sixteenth-note figures, and with an inversion of the hornpipe tune in the bass. The sketch breaks off at the subsequent measure, where Schoenberg scribbles *ohne 16tel* (without sixteenths), realizing that these would clutter up the texture--while in the score, he saves them for measures 310ff. But since it would be unlikely for Schoenberg to give up on having the tune appear prominently in inversion, it is a delightful confirmation to find it, unmistakably and clearly presented in the bassline of measures 350-351, to be answered by the string quartet's four-octave-doubled *rectus*, two measures later. It is, as always, of great interest to observe how quickly a wrong turn was avoided for measure 297, where that inversion might have been mired in textural overabundance!

Curiously enough, the contents of one leaf's two "upright" pages seem more concerned with the working out of textural details, whereas the stress in the other's is on general continuity. In particular, the opening of the hornpipe is given a good deal of space, featuring a tentative continuity draft up to the original repeat sign (as in Handel), after a corresponding number of measures, yet including Schoenberg's second ending at measure 327. A fascinating aspect of this draft is that, except for some octave displacements, it is almost the same as measures 292-299 in the solo string quartet's first violin, measures 300-303 in violin II, and after that, intermittently, until measure 308, as in the finished score. However, the layout of this hornpipe tune is intensely changed in the finished work: instead of Handel's twenty-six measures until the repeat sign to end the first strain, Schoenberg's elaboration is of a markedly different design: the repeated music is between measures 10 and 35,³ and there is no repeated second strain. Schoenberg's decision to expand and transform the movement as he did may in part be explained by a marginal note, written as a memo to himself, around the right and bottom edge of the page; it is by far the most revealing--and puzzling--notation on these leaves. A translation follows the cited text, for whose transcription I am indebted to Andrea Castillo Herreshoff,

Research Assistant at the Arnold Schoenberg Institute; her kind assistance allowed a recalcitrant phrase to be finally deciphered.

Ich versuche herauszufinden, was der Sinn in diesem Stück sein könnte, und mit dessen ins Auge fallende Eigenthümlichkeit ich zunächst nichts anzufangen weiss: dass das in den ersten 4-5 oder 6 Takten angegebene "Thema" niemals wiederauftritt, aber trotzdem der erste Teil (ebenso der II.) als Ganzes wiederholt werden soll. Während also dem Thema selbst *keine* besondere Bedeutung beigelegt wird, soll der ganze Teil sich einprägen--das ist doch der Sinn der Wiederholung; nicht etwa blosser Verlängerung: Wasser in den Wein hineingiessen--wobei aber die Einprägsamkeit des ganzen auf der der kleinen und kleinsten Teile beruht und diese gefördert wird durch die Wiederholung!--Es scheint die technische Absicht zu bestehen, allmählich neue Figuren aus den Anfangsgestalten zu gewinnen und diese nicht oder selten zu wiederholen (z.B. Takt 6, 8, 16, 17, 24 etc.)--Ferner scheint eine rythmische Entwicklung zu folgendem zu bestehen: Takt 1 hat 3 8tel, Takt 2: 2 X 2, Takt 3 u 4, 3 X 2, T 5 lauter 8tel--nur nimmt es wieder ab.--Regelmässig ist das zwar nicht, aber "irgendwie" ist es so gehandhabt. In meiner Verbesserung habe ich getrachtet diese Methode nicht zu verleugnen, habe aber ganz leere Figuren, wie Takt 11 u 12 ausgelassen. Das ist ja gar nichts.

I am trying to make out the sense of this piece; for the moment I am at a loss as to how I might deal with its obvious peculiarity, where a "theme" is stated in the first 4-5 or 6 measures and never reappears; yet the the moment I am at a loss as to how I might deal with its obvious peculiarity, where a "theme" is stated in the first 4-5 or 6 measures and never reappears; yet the first part (as well as the second) is supposed to be repeated. In other words, while no particular significance is attached to that theme, the entire part (or strain) is nevertheless expected to impress itself on the listener--that being, after all, the purpose of repetition; rather than a mere lengthening, which would be like pouring water into wine--but the impressibility of the whole thing is based on the smaller, and even the smallest, of its component elements, and that is enhanced by such repetition!--There seems to be an intent to structure by gradually gaining new figures derived from the initial configurations, and of not repeating these, or at least of rarely doing so (for instance in measures 6, 8, 16, 17, 24, etc.)--There appears, furthermore, to be a rhythmic progression, as follows: measure 1 contains 3 eighths; measure 2, 2 X 2; measure 3 and 4, 3 X 2* [*The increase is reversed: measure 3 contains 4 x 2; measure 4 only 3 x 2. Schoenberg asserts this indirectly in his next sentence.]; measure 5, eighths throughout--only it diminishes after that. Although not regular, it seems "somehow" to be handled in that way. In my improvement I have endeavored not to deny this method, but I have omitted altogether empty figures, as in measures 11 and 12. Those represent nothing.

Schoenberg's trouble with this hornpipe is hard to understand. Inasmuch as it is the only music in Handel's Concerto Grosso that successfully avoids a rigidly periodized continuity, one would naturally conclude that Schoenberg might have felt particularly drawn to it; so much so, that it would not be far-fetched to imagine that he chose *this* composition (out of the twelve) by reason of the lively hornpipe. As one reads his marginal comment, moreover, it seems as if he had

neglected to recognize that the piece's binary construction and the repetition of both strains is simply part of the game played by such a dance tune. The implied disappearance of the "theme," after its initial statement, is what brings about the pleasant unpredictability of the music's unfolding. Schoenberg's protestation appears contrary to his own habits, his own compositional predilections, and his firm belief that unwarranted repetition without some perceptible change in what is repeated is contrary to good sense in any music of interest--and certainly in his own works. The issue here, however, seems to be not so much the lack of the "theme's" reappearance, as the "unsatisfactory" way in which motivic material is dealt with (or "Handel'd"), so that a slightly helter-skelter mode of construction could be inferred to threaten coherence and continuity. By way of an answer to his charge--and in keeping with the *Verbesserung* (which could be taken as "correction," as well as the gentler "improvement") of which he speaks, Schoenberg's recomposition includes plenty of thematic recurrences that are recognizable as such, despite their incorporated changes, and a much expanded, far more venturesome, yet equally comely construction. His remark, in fact, is put into some slight doubt by that extraordinarily imaginative reworking; it is as if the composer were freeing the teacher from the strictures of his very convention-bound, utterly "traditional" method of instructing his composition students--as indeed it was experienced by them *all*--and as though, rather than Schoenberg's having in the process become Handelian, he had instead persuaded the stout Mr. Handel to be Schoenbergian, for a change!

Lastly, the matter of the Concerto's overall key scheme, as brought to my attention by a remark from Paul Zukofsky: instead of a "central" B-flat and its more or less symmetrical upper and lower thirds (i.e., g and D), Schoenberg's inclination was to test a greater degree of equidistance, as between B-flat, D, and F-sharp. How about an emphasis "somewhere" on F-sharp? That place was thereupon readily found to be in the hornpipe, at measure 358, where a deceptive cadence turns into a surprising, if brief, "sojourn"--still, long enough to linger--on F-sharp. Yet no notation for this tantalizing spot is to be seen on the four sketch pages at hand.

¹ Arnold Schoenberg, *Sämtliche Werke, Abteilung VII: Bearbeitungen; Reihe B, Band 27, Teil 2* (Mainz: B. Schott's Söhne and Wien: Universal Edition AG, 1987), pp. 109-99.

² Ibid. *Reihe A, Band 27* (1976), pp. 101-220.

³ i.e., measures 301 and 326 in the score.